DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 399 081 PS 024 544

AUTHOR McNamee, Abigail S.; De Chiara, Edith
TITLE Inviting Stories To Help Young Children Cope with Stressful Life Experiences.
PUB DATE 96
NOTE 37p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Affective Behavior; Art Therapy; Bibliotherapy; Childrens Art; Childrens Writing; Classroom Environment; *Coping; Early Childhood Education; Emotional Adjustment; Emotional Experience; Freehand Drawing; Instructional Materials; Preschool Education; Psychotherapy; Story Reading; Story Telling; *Stress Management; Teaching Methods; Well Being; *Young Children

ABSTRACT

Children experience a wide variety of life experiences that are stressful to them. Children's stories and drawings allow adults to understand children's perceptions and reactions, and picture books enable children to experience stressors safely in a supportive setting. This paper describes a storytelling and drawing intervention based on art therapy, bibliotherapy, and other child psychotherapy techniques for use by teachers of young children coping with stress. The paper emphasizes the complex nature of stress and the wide range in children's abilities to cope with stress, discusses various child psychotherapy methods, and differentiates teachers' and therapists' roles. Several suggestions for using this intervention are offered, including preparing the physical and interpersonal environment, deciding on methods and criteria for picture book selection, identifying topics for picture books, and obtaining available art supplies used by children with little or no instruction. The paper also describes the steps involved in the intervention: (1) selecting the theme, generally an experience that causes stress for young children, and then selecting a picture book that reflects this theme; (2) reading the storybook, focusing more on pictures than text, and then reviewing the story; (3) drawing a story with the children, focusing on personal expression; (4) asking the children to tell a story about their pictures and helping them understand the thematic material presented in the drawings and stories; (5) writing down the story, based on the drawing; and (6) reading the completed stories to the children or making them available for the children to look at and read as they choose. (KDFB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 399 081

INVITING STORIES TO HELP YOUNG CHILDREN COPE WITH STRESSFUL LIFE EXPERIENCES

OUTLINE

Introduction

1. Philosophical Underpinnings: Stories and Young Children
2. Theoretical Underpinnings
   a. Stress and Young Children
   b. Psychotherapy/Bibliotherapy/Art Therapy
3. The Setting
   a. The Physical Environment
   b. The Interpersonal Environment
4. The Process
   a. The Materials
      Picture Books
      Art Supplies
   b. The Technique
      Reading a Story with Children
      Drawing a Story with Children
      Talking about a Story with Children
   c. The Sequence
      Story Model
      Reading a Story with Children
      Drawing a Story
      Talking about a Story

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Abigail S. McNamee
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

PS 024544

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

INVITING STORIES TO HELP YOUNG CHILDREN
COPE WITH STRESSFUL LIFE EXPERIENCES

Dr. Edith De Chiara, Associate Professor, H. H. Lehman College
Dr. Abigail Stahl McNamee, Associate Professor, H. H. Lehman College

About the authors: Dr. De Chiara is an art educator and certified art therapist particularly interested in art for exceptional children. Dr. McNamee coordinates the graduate Early Childhood Program at Lehman where she is a child development specialist; she is a practicing child psychotherapist.

Introduction

- Patricia constructed a clay figure of a little girl with her arms pinned to her sides. She lay the little girl in a shoe box diorama graveyard surrounding her with flowers and disembodied feet. Patricia was sexually abused by her father when she was four.

- Steve drew a big mother bear going off to get honey, leaving her cub waiting alone by by their cave in the mountain. Steve is a latchkey child who spends hours alone each day waiting for his mom to come home from work. His dad was killed when Steve was three.

- Migdalia sat or stood in class silently, staring vacantly as the other children played or worked. Attempts to involve her are generally unsuccessful but she was able to construct a clay model of herself in a crib with her mother stiffly in the distance and her grandmother standing nearby with her hands on her hips and her mouth turned down. Migdalia's mother is a drug addict; Migdalia lives with her grandmother.

- Joey talks repeatedly about death. He wants to know what dead people look like, where they go, why doctors don't help sick people. Joey's mother died of cancer four weeks ago. He draws her as a mother bird perched on a mountain overlooking and protecting, from a distance, her three eggs.

Every teacher knows that the children with whom they work have experienced and continue to experience stressful life events. They know that their children are often overwhelmed or appear to be valiantly attempting to cope in school when their stresses are

PS 024544

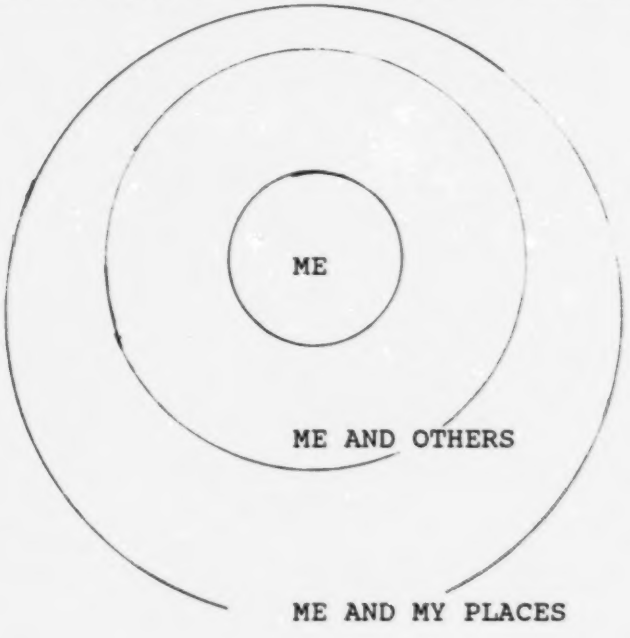
experienced in multiples, often intensely, often with little or no support from any source. What teachers often don't know is how to be helpful when time and curriculum and administration run against them, when they have had little or no training in how to help children cope, and when they are afraid that whatever they attempt to do might somehow be "wrong" for the child. The following is suggested as an intervention for teachers and children which is easy to implement, requires no special training, takes little time, fits into routine almost anywhere/anytime, and offers the possibility of soothing support. An advantage of such an intervention is that the energy of children and teachers will be freed, at least temporarily, to turn toward what should be the exciting business of a school day. But there is another advantage: both teacher and children will be working in synchrony to integrate a child's experience, opening the door of the classroom to the child's life outside, allowing children to be whole persons in school bringing along their emotional selves to join with their intellectual and physical selves in a social environment that says: "All that you experience belongs to you and, therefore, belongs here with you".

Philosophical Underpinnings: Stories and Young Children

This is an intervention which draws on those techniques of art therapy, bibliotherapy, and child psychotherapy in general which can well be borrowed by teachers and which, in fact, will seem very familiar to them, very close to what teachers already do. It is an intervention which involves storytelling in many

forms: the storytelling of children's picture books, the storytelling of artmaking, and the adaptive storytelling of children reacting to what they hear and see.

The world of the young child is ever in the process of expanding and contracting from and to "me" and "me and others" including family, friends, and acquaintances to "me and my places" Children move forward and outward as if expanding themselves, not only their world, through concentric circles. Then they double back on themselves, retreating for varying lengths of time to s smaller circle, a smaller part of their world, perhaps for support or for greater understanding, perhaps to build a skill or to practice one. At each circle of the children's world they engage with people and things, as well as with their inner "me" in the complicated process of growing and changing.



It is only through moving into the circles of the children's world that we can begin to understand their experience, their perceptions and conceptualizations, their reactions through feeling and thought and behavior, on which we can then base our intervention. As teachers, limited, at least some of the time, to a classroom, moving into the children's world presents some complications. We share, of course, that part of their world which we create or co-create in and around school. We may visit other nooks of their world (home, field trips, etc.), and we are hopefully often/always gently visiting their inner "me" world as children choose to share themselves in their unique variety of ways. We are limited, however, by being older and forgetful of our own childhood, by adult concerns, and by children's lack of trust of our ability to understand and accept, their fears of retribution, and even by their sometimes limited skill in using words to describe and explain.

We present here another means of moving into the children's world---through picture book stories---not only for our learning experience or for the children's, but for a mutual learning and soothing. Picture books serve as a medium for helping the teacher to enter the children's world and for helping children to identify with or experience at a safe distance and at their own rates, and then react to, some aspect of their world which is only partially familiar, partially known, while in a supportive setting. We have selected as our focus picture books which present realistic stories and situations because of their powerful interest value for

children and teachers, and because we want to encourage dialogue among children and teachers around real, and often troubling, events in daily life. We would like to bring these real world happenings into the classroom and, in essence, open the doors and increase the vision of the classroom while we are still within it.

Through each picture book teacher and children will move together in a synchrony, interactively led, as we explore what belongs to children, as we explore the children's experiences and their resulting thoughts and feelings. This shared experience offers children a special kind of control, rare in the adult world which they are required to negotiate, and communicates to them that they are so important that we wish to move into their world: see it, touch it, sense it fully with them as guide through picture and word images, stimulated by a wonderful selection (an almost unlimited one) of picture books, and expanded and transformed through the child's own storytelling word and picture images.

The children will interpret their world for us through dialogue, stimulated by a picture book or a part of one. They will let us know what is important to them through their responses, self-initiated questions, and statements. We will pay close attention to these. We will explore a little further with questions and statements of our own and pay close attention here, as well, to what we ask or say so as not to intrude too harshly into the children's world, only to move a little closer. We will listen carefully to what the children say and to what they do not say remembering that they are sharing their world with us and that

we must be gentle with their trust.

We will suggest that the children create their own stories through drawing, perhaps more than one or many, in sequence or not, because we know that words are often insufficient or frustrating, unapproachable or frightening for young children. We will then gently encourage words once again in the form of a story about the artwork, using the children's art as a bridge from the published word and pictures of the picture book to the children's own words, their own story about the story in a sense. We will be fluid, moving back and forth across the bridge from picture book to children's talk, stopping here and visiting there, remembering that children's development is never a straight arrow through their world, but always forward a little and back a little with hesitations and forays as glimpse or touch or chance comment gives birth to a new feeling or thought, a new integration of experience.

We will write down the children's talk in the form of a story, perhaps a story about the published story just read, perhaps a story changed by the child's mind so much as to be unrecognizable to our adult mind; but, we will remember that this new story is how children show us what is important to them in their world. When the children are ready they, sooner or later, they will write their story themselves and yet another form of their story will have evolved. This story can now be shared aloud, or not, with the small or large group, or not, each child choosing just how public he or she wished to be. The sharing, if chosen, can be teacher

read or, when ready and possible, child read.

THE PROCESS FROM PICTURE BOOK STORY TO CHILD STORY

Shared Experience: Picture Book Story

The Children's Response: Storytelling

The Children's Response: Drawing

The Children's Response: Storytelling

Through this kind of intervention, sometimes quiet and slow moving, sometimes noisy and rapid paced, the classroom becomes an enabling environment, the picture book enabling teacher and children to stop for a moment in a shared experience, focusing on some aspect of the children's world; the children enabling the teacher to move farther into their rich world, the teacher enabling the children to conceptualize their experience through receiving and creating images, inching or leaping forward in their understanding of "me", "me and others", "me and my places" while feeling the support that is possible for people in company with each other.

Theoretical Underpinnings: Stress and Young Children

Children experience a wide variety of life experiences which are stressful to them. Some of these experiences are lived through "first hand", or directly, with children in the thick of an experience which crashes, or reverberates more gently but still painfully, around them. Other experiences are lived through "second hand", or indirectly, with children on the edges listening, often evesdropping, to adult conversation or that of other children; with children watching a movie or newscast.

Stressful life experiences can result from primarily

internal factors: congenital organicity (information processing dysfunction, ethnicity, even physical appearance), trauma or disease, age-appropriate developmental perceptions (fears and wishes), and mistaken, unhelpful, and self-defeating perceptions of self and/or others (McNamee & McNamee, 1981, p. 182-183; McNamee, 1982, p. 5).

Stressful life experiences can result, also, from primarily external factors: from the family environment (separation, discord, child abuse, birth or adoption of a sibling, move to a new home and or community), from the immediate outside community (neighbors or friends), from the school (teachers, administrators, and other personnel; academics; extra-curricular activities; classmates and schoolmates; transportation; neighborhoods traveled through), from the larger community (a section of the city, the city itself, the state, or the country in which children live), and from world events (war, uprising, natural phenomena, energy-related phenomena) (pp. 184-185; p. 5).

In reality, because of the complicated nature of even a child's life, it is often difficult or impossible to separate out one "internal" or "external" stressful experience in a child's life, an interplay of internal and external factors, multiple stress factors, are generally apparent.

All children do not react to a stressful life experience in the same way. Children's reactions are dependent on their sense of self and the experience. They behave as if they have asked themselves and have answered for themselves, "Do I have the

ability, power and control necessary to avoid, minimize, or end this experience?" and "Is this something which can (or cannot) be avoided, minimized, ended?" Children's perceptions of self and experience evolve from their past life experiences and are affected by other's perceptions of these same events so effectively communicated to them (p. 185). All of these children and their accumulations of past and present stressful life experiences gather together in any classroom and a teacher is confronted with, not only a wide-ranging collection of stressful life experiences, but a range of coping abilities as well. Most simply put, children's coping abilities seem to organize roughly into three groups: 1) exceptionally good coping skills which involve spontaneous recovery, personal growth, integration of the stressful life experience into one's lifestyle in a positive way, and the accumulation of a "bank of alternatives" for coping with stressful life experiences in the future; 2) adequate coping skills which involve harder, probably longer lasting, work to achieve the above with, perhaps, less frequent success and a resource bank which grows more slowly; 3) exceptionally poor coping skills which involve disorganization following a stressful life experience, much harder struggle to surmount the experience, and, perhaps, no accumulation of a resource bank of alternatives for coping with future stress, and lack of success reinforcing their negative expectations of self and experience (p. 187).

Children's varying ability to cope comes from differences in their neurological/biological/psychological makeup which is

in part their genetic inheritance and in part their environmental experience which includes peopled experiences. The parts that people play in causing a stressful life experience, or in supporting a child's coping with it, is of great significance in every child's life. The old and familiar question, "Are you part of the problem or part of the solution?" comes to play here and should not be overlooked.

Theoretical Underpinnings: Psychotherapy/Bibliotherapy/Art Therapy

Psychotherapy might be defined as "the communication of person-related understanding, respect, and a wish to be of help" (Reisman, 1973, p. 10). Reisman explains that "person-related understanding" refers to communication which attempts to understand the client's or another person's thoughts, feelings, or behavior. He further explains that "respect" denotes positive regard for an individual's dignity, rights, uniqueness, and capacity for constructive change. Reisman stresses that psychotherapy is a "certain kind of communication" which, to be meaningful, necessitates that a client be able to attend to it and to understand it (p. 11). Reisman's definition applies to both adult and child psychotherapy and transcends any particular method of therapy as well as any particular role or title of the therapist. Perhaps an appreciable difference between the "professional" child therapist and a teacher acting in this particular therapeutic manner is that the therapist is trained to, and hopefully does, function primarily in this way and does so during time-limited "sessions". The teacher moves among a variety of behaviors, is in

fact trained to carry out a variety of behaviors, hopefully in a generally therapeutic environment, and functions like the professional therapist only occassionally. How occassionally probably depends on teacher sensitivity, scheduling pressures, and children's needs. The teacher is borrowing from the child therapist without becoming therapist; the teacher is similar but different.

There are a variety of methods of psychotherapy for children as well as adults. While strictly conversational psychotherapy is sometimes attempted with young children, more common would be action-oriented methods involving play, movement and dance, art, music, drama, picture books, and storytelling (Nickerson & O'Laughlin, 1982, pp. 3, 5). Often child psychotherapy involves a symphony of each of these methods limited only by a child's choice of available materials and/or a therapist's skill. Child psychotherapy should offer children an opportunity "to experience growth under the most favorable conditions" (Axline, 1947, p. 16) but how this is attempted can vary. Play therapy, bibliotherapy and art therapy are often integrated, but each independently has well-developed techniques which can be borrowed by teachers.

In play therapy children are given the opportunity to play out their "accumulated feelings of tension, frustration, insecurity, aggression, fear, bewilderment, confusion" (p. 16) through the natural and already familiar medium of play. The same can be said for bibliotherapy and art therapy with only the familiar medium shifting to books or art respectively. Each of

these techniques offers a unique means for enabling communication because of the uniqueness of the medium utilized, but each also offers a means of externalizing inner images whether or not the experience is accompanied by a verbal exchange with a therapeutic adult. Each offers relief, and an opportunity to interrupt and change patterns.

- Play therapy allows children to recreate, often with playthings but not always, in a miniature time and space, in a fantasy world, what has been frightening or painful or puzzling in their larger real world.

- Bibliotherapy offers stories and pictures of the real world which are presented with some degree of realism or fantasty and, in both cases, arouse issues and dispell fears through communicating to children that they are not alone, that other children or childlike animals have experienced what they have experienced. Often these story characters offer problem-solving options to the child reader which can reduce feelings of helplessness.

- Art therapy offers children "an alternative means of communication which does not involve sophisticated speech". It is another language, "non-verbal and symbolic, through which they can express, perhaps unconsciously, feelings, wishes, fears and phantasies (unconscious process) central to their inner experience" (Case & Dalley, 1990, p. 2).

Each of these therapy techniques, alone or in symphony, can exist for a child, and is often utilized by children, even without a therapeutic adult present. Children are easily drawn to interact

with playthings, look through picture books, and make spontaneous drawings, when each is available in the environment, because of the power of the medium and the powerful need to move toward resolution.

The Setting: The Physical Environment

Stressful life experiences are so much a part of the fabric of children's lives that it is necessary to think of the school environment as a healing environment, the classroom as an island of healing. In an early childhood classroom playthings, books, and art materials are traditionally available and encourage young children to "play out" their feelings about stressful life experiences. For the purpose of this intervention we focus particularly on children's picture books and drawing materials of the kind generally already available. While these materials will probably be out and easily accessible in the classroom on a daily basis, we suggest that a particular picture book and the particular art materials be placed close to teacher and children, perhaps on a table to gather around or an inviting floor rug, just prior to beginning. The atmosphere of our island of healing should be the soothing and stimulating blend of any early childhood classroom, no more or less so for this intervention: a "good growing ground" (Axline, p. 16) wherein children feel welcome and know that they are important.

The Setting: The Interpersonal Environment

It has been argued that a teacher is not trained to be

"therapist" and yet teachers are somehow expected to enter the classroom well versed in the intricacies of human relationships. During any given day they are called upon to "motivate learning, encourage autonomy, bolster self-esteem, engender self-confidence, allay anxiety, diminish fear, decrease frustration, defuse rage, and de-escalate conflict" (Ginott, 1972, p. 45).

In an early childhood setting, it is the teacher who is in a position to be the most helpful in helping children cope with stressful life experieces because of his or her daily relationship with the children, knowledge of child development and of each particular child, knowledge of learning theory in practice, and observational skills (McNamee & McNamee, 19--, p. 191). It is the teacher who can most readily notice, from the children's cues that support is needed. It is the teacher who is aware of the kinds of stresses that his or her group of children are experiencing and who is available during the day to support a child or the group as needed, sometimes non-directively, simply by providing materials and time during the day, sometimes with a planned intervention of the kind we are suggesting. It is the teacher whose presence is felt either as one who commands, nags, goads, pries, labels, disapproves, and criticizes or as one who supports by gentle suggestion, encouragement, acceptance, by neither restraining nor hurrying. The presence and participation of an accepting, understanding, friendly teacher encourages a sense of security. Limitations, and few they should be, add to this

sense of security and to a sense of reality.

Axline (1947) describes the role of play therapists in a way that can also be utilized by teachers: they are sensitive to what the children are feeling and expressing through play and drawing and verbalization reflecting the children's expressions back to them in a way which helps them to understand themselves better. They respect the children and their ability to stand on their own two feet and to become more mature and independent if given the opportunity to do so. They convey that they understand and accept children regardless of what children say or do. They give children the courage to go deeper into their innermost world and to bring out into the open their real selves (p. 17). They test out the hypothesis that, given a chance, children can and do become more mature, more positive in their attitudes, more constructive in the way they express their inner drives (p. 18).

Perhaps the implication thus far is that children bring their stressful life experiences to school with them, having experienced them outside of the building. Children also, of course, experience stress in the classroom setting itself. Teachers can help children to cope by minimizing the stressful life experiences in the school setting (their variety, frequency, and duration) and by helping children to cope with stressful experiences which are in progress in gradually increasing degrees. Such an approach is not aimed at the elimination of stress, which is neither possible nor desirable. It is aimed at the reduction of stress and associated anxiety. It is aimed at meeting children's immediate emotional, social, and

cognitive needs by being available and supportive, and at building a resource bank of alternatives upon which children can draw in coping with future stressful life experiences (McNamee & McNamee, 1981, p. 192-193; McNamee, 1982, p. 7).

The Process: The Materials (Picture Books)

Today you can name just about any problem and there is a picture book about it for young children. "Almost anything you see in newspapers shows up in children's books in a very short time" (New York Times, 1990, p. C1). Such books are designed to help children cope with a wide range of emotionally stressful life experiences from death, divorce, hospitalization, alcoholism, homosexuality and aids to everyday problems like going to sleep, lack of self-confidence, shyness, jealousy, difficulty in getting along with other children (Gillis, 1978, preface). Specific subdivisions of these stressful life experiences are also appearing: books on divorce, for example, no longer focus only on the actual separation between parents but on the loss of relationship with grandparents, parental dating, the loss of a step parent. The presence of these books, their very quantity, raises issues of how to select them and, of course, how to use them.

The selection of picture books related to stressful life experiences occurs first by topic. Topics might be grouped under the following categories (Gillis, 1978, pp. x-xi; McNamee & McNamee, 1981, pp. 182-183).

EMOTIONS (anger, jealousy, love/affection, boredom, fear,

lonliness, shyness, fantasy, etc., often age-related)

BEHAVIOR (quarreling, teasing, hurting, sharing/possessiveness)

FAMILY (functional relationships including extended family)

DIFFICULT SITUATION (death, divorce, physical trauma/illness, handicap, abuse, physical appearance, ethnicity)

NEW SITUATION (move to a new home/neighborhood; new baby/adoption of sibling; going to the doctor, dentist, hospital; new teacher)

FRIENDSHIP (with adults, older children, younger children, peers)

Selection of picture books might be made by a teacher according to topic in one of three ways: 1) reviewing the past, present, expected stressful life experiences, behaviors, or emotional expressions of a particular group of children; 2) reviewing those topics which are thought to be particularly interesting or relevant to a particular age group; or 3) reviewing the availability of picture books related to stressful life experiences available in classroom, school or public library by perusing the shelves, card catalogue, or bibliotherapy lists made available by many librarians.

Once a topic has been decided upon, a criteria for determining the quality of a particular book should be considered. We would recommend the following criteria (Delisle & McNamee, 1981) You would be, in essence, determining whether a particular book meets a child's/group of children's needs:

INTELLECTUAL NEEDS: Is the book accurate and age-appropriate?

Some picture books present inaccurate information regardless of the age of the child reader; some present accurate information

which would, however, be misunderstood by young children usually because the information is abstract in nature.

SOCIAL NEEDS: Does the book indicate through its characters that the child reader is not alone; that other's share/have shared the child's experience?

Children use the story of a picture book as social experience; its characters seem realistic; even animals do things that humans do, feel what humans feel. If these behaviors and feelings are similar to a child's own, it communicates that the child reader is not alone, that he or she is sharing a stressful life experience which tends to ease its burden.

EMOTIONAL NEEDS: Does the book indicate through its characters that the child reader is o.k. to feel as he/she does?

Children often feel that they are bad if they feel a certain way, especially if they feel sad or angry, jealous or needy. If a character in a picture book feels that same way and is accepted, particularly by adults, it communicates that the feeling is o.k. and that the child reader is o.k. to be feeling so.

The criteria here refers only to picture book content as related to stressful life experiences. Additional criteria for selection of picture books involving illustration, characterization, etc. are also available and itemized in most children's literature anthologies readily available in any library. Once a preliminary grouping of books has been selected by a teacher according to topic and quality, a child or group of children might be asked to select which book is read at a particular time; or, the

teacher might have a strong reason for the timing of a particular book.

The Process: The Materials (Art Supplies)

The purpose for the children's artmaking in response to picture books about stressful life experiences is to elicit their thoughts and feelings through images rather than words. Unlike the reading of the picture book and unlike later talking, words are not of primary concern. Unlike the making of art in an art teaching situation, the learning of skills and the production of an aesthetic quality of product is not of primary concern as well. What is of primary concern, is that the artmaking process provide the vehicle for storymaking in response to the the visual and verbal content of the stimulant picture book.

Materials have been selected that can be used by children with little or no instruction. Materials have been selected that are easily available to classroom teachers. The process has been limited to drawing; the materials have been limited to paper and direct mark-making tools. It is our intention that the art products be completed within a single time frame, of flexible length to be determined by the teacher, when the children's response to the picture book story is very present and high.

Recommended materials:

1) Paper (8 1/2 x 11") typing paper, xerox paper, mimeograph paper;

Paper (9 x 12", 12 x 18", and 18 x 24") white drawing paper;

2) Drawing tools for smaller paper (8 1/2 x 11", 9 x 12")

pencil, thin-tipped markers, ballpoint pen, small crayons;

Drawing tools for larger paper (12 x 18", 18 x 24") broad and medium-tipped markers, large crayons.

In a discussion of specific drawing materials, Wilson & Wilson (1982) state that the pencil is probably the most commonly used drawing tool of children and that markers are a favorite drawing tool of children of all ages (p. 13).

The Process: The Technique (Reading a Story with Children)

Within a relaxed and supportive classroom environment reading a story to a child or even a group of children, the first step of our intervention, should not be a formalized production. The teacher's first decision should be one of number: Am I reading to one, a small group, or the entire class? The decision of number will then affect setting: Where will we be most comfortable? Many adults and children associate story reading with a soft, cozy place. Every classroom for young children should have a rug area; some have individual rugs for each child which can be gathered around the reader, some have large pillows a few have soft furniture (sofa, easy chairs). In warm weather an outside, comfortable area might be chosen. It is probably best to begin in whatever positions are customary even if rather formal; but, we would recommend attempting to move toward closeness with teacher on the same level as the children.

The teacher should introduce a picture book, but simply, saying something like, "This is a story about..." Children will often respond immediately suggesting something of their own

experience. Let this go on for a time, adding "Let's see what happens?" Read the story with some enthusiasm, but not overly dramatically. Your purpose is to communicate, to stay in touch with the children and their responses, not to act it out. Focus on the pictures even more than the text; if some words or concepts seem difficult for the children to understand, skip them. Draw the children's attention to what each picture shows. If the children interrupt, listen carefully for indications of their understanding of the story or of their own experience.

When the reading is finished say, "let's look at the pictures again" and as you point to each ask, "What is happening here...and here...?" As the children respond, listen carefully once again for indications of their understanding of the story or of their own experience. The teacher can decide, based on the children's comments, what to emphasize in further questions. Thinking about any picture book can go in a variety of directions. In this instance follow where the children have led and continue to lead you. You might ask questions about the story character/s, "How did...feel about...", and then relate the character/s to the child readers, "How does it feel to...", keeping in mind that this is not a lesson, not an academic exercise: the focus is not vocabulary, or sequence, or visual and auditory descrimination; it is not an exercise in learning to read. It is, rather, a time to share what is important to children about a picture book story, a story which might help children cope with a stressful life experience by presenting accurate and appropriate age-related information, by

communicating that they are not alone in their experience, and by communicating that they are o.k. to feel as they do.

The Process: The Technique (Drawing a Story with Children)

It must be reemphasized that drawing a story with children, the second step of our proposed intervention, is related more to art therapy wherein the materials provide a tangible medium through which children can express their feelings and thoughts, rather than art teaching wherein the primary focus is on learning skills in drawing (or other art techniques) and utilizing art materials. In this second step our concerns are with:

1) providing an environment that is most conducive to having children use the graphic process to represent their response to the stimulus of the picture book story;

2) introducing the drawing process after discussion of the picture book story;

3) dealing with possible reluctance to draw expressed in hesitancy about beginning or, perhaps, requesting that the teacher "tell" them what to do, or becoming "stuck" and giving up refusing to complete their drawing;

4) bringing the drawing process to an end and making transition to the "talking about a story" phase, talking about the drawing story.

During this step the uncritical, non-judgmental atmosphere continues with the teacher accepting the experience of the children, their interest in the picture book story, and the visual statements that result from this experience and interest. The

children should sense the support of the teacher and feel unhampered in using the graphic process to express and come to terms with their conflicts and issues in a classroom situation.

Materials to be used should be placed, prior to the reading of the picture book, where the children can have easy and immediate access to them so that there can be a smooth transition to the image-making process: arranged before the children on the rug on which they sit, before them on the table everyone is grouped around; enough materials for one child or a group. When the teacher feels that the picture book discussion has progressed far enough, he or she might say, "Let's draw a story about..." (whatever aspect of the picture book story seems important to the children). Further intervention might take the form of questioning children individually about the picture book story to help them concretize image, or asking them to "tell" (rehearse) what they plan to draw which can help their decision-making processing (i.e., "John, what idea do you have for your drawing?" or "What would you like to begin with?").

For children who are stuck, reluctant to continue or finish a drawing, consider gently reviewing what is already drawn asking what else might be included (i.e., "Can you tell me about this...and this..." or "I like the way that you...". A child's own interruption of the process might be an indication that children need time to organize their thoughts or process their personal experience of the story. The majority of children generally relax as they get into the process of image making. According to Rubin

(1978, p. 65) this relaxing into the artmaking processseems to be stimulated by the materials and the sense of permission to "freely express feelings and fantasies". It is also her contention that the guiding principle at this point is the least intervention possible for the "most tolerable and authentic flow" (p. 71). The teacher should remain a neutral observer. If it seems necessary to intervene, the more unobtrusive the intervention the better.

The thematic material conveyed through the drawing can help the teacher further understand each child's life experience. and understanding of picturebook content. It is not essential, however, that children's drawings are closely or obviously connected to the picture book. The drawings are not meant to be pictures about the story per se; they come, rather, from what the children feel is important. The picture book story merely provides a basic structure through which an issue/s is introduced; whatever the issue, it will be filtered through the child's experience and understanding and take on a life of its own...more or less recognizable to the teacher.

The Process: The Technique (Talking about a Story with Children)

The teacher can introduce this third step of our intervention by asking the children to tell a story about their picture (i.e. "Let's tell a story about your picture/s" or "Tell me a story about your picture"). In asking this of children, the teacher should understand that when we ask children to "tell" about their drawings, we are requesting that they translate the iconic (visual) mode of expression inherent in their drawings to the linguistic

mode. Many children are accustomed to doing this kind of translation; others may respond with a puzzled look or state that they "don't know". It is not, however, only a matter of practice. This kind of response occurs most frequently when children's art has not yet developed into "fully fledged representations" (Dubowski, 1990); their work may, in fact, have no "linguistic counterpart" (p. 8). During this early stage of development the iconic mode has a line of development that is "distinct and separate from the linguistic" (p. 8). Dubowski indicates, however, that once a child has developed representational drawing skills (usually by 4-5 years of age), the drawing, no matter how primitive, can correspond to a linguistic equivalent. For many children this "marriage" between the iconic and linguistic modes is so exciting that children are not only anxious to tell about the drawing to another, they will often talk about the picture-making process when alone (p. 8). When children are reluctant to talk about their pictures, it is important to respect this and to give them the option of later, of one-to-one telling about it with the teacher, or even of never. Sometimes telling the story through visual images is as far as a child needs to go at present. Important throughout this intervention is to suggest, to allow, but never to push the children.

The thematic material, conveyed through the drawing and the children's verbalization about their art work, can help teachers to further understand each child's world. It is not only important to hear what the children say, but how they say it: the form and

quality of what is said, the "tempo, pitch, intensity. stress, articulation, vocal quality, and their 'flavor' (confidential, belligerent, fearful, etc.)" (Rubin, 1978, p. 63). Rubin also recommends that the "interviewing" about the drawing be separated in time and space from the actual image-making (p. 13). This last thought requires some experimentation on the part of the teacher who can develop a procedure, or range of procedures, which "fit" your group, an individual child, or the particular day. It is possible to move children from rug where the story was read, to table for the art making, back to rug (or yet another area) for the children's telling about their drawing. It may, however, seem that this movement breaks the flow and seems disruptive necessitating the resettling of the children at each shift in space. Regardless of the movement issue, teachers might experiment with delaying the children's "telling" until later in the day. This kind of delay may enable children to tell more because they have had time to process their experience with the story reading and art making; but, it may create too much distance causing the children to forget, causing loss of interest or defensive closing over when an issue is almost too "hot" for comfortable handling.

Having children look at, reflect upon, and talk about their art work is an important component of art therapy and of this intervention. For the adult and the children, a discussion of the work may help to clarify and extend ideas not fully realized as the drawing was being done. Understanding the meaning of children's drawings is a collaborative effort in which the

children's own thoughts and associations play a central role (Rubin, 1987, p. 84). Rubin suggests that, when interviewing children about their art work, one should restrict the number of questions asked, keeping them open-ended; not influence what the children say about the work; guard against asking questions of making statements which demonstrate your own ideas and values; and not guess at the meaning of either recognizable or abstractly drawn images (p. 123). If children become stuck or seem threatened when asked to tell a story about their art work, the teacher might suggest that they speak as a character in the drawing rather than tell about it (p. 123). The teacher might stimulate this by saying "Hi, little girl (addressing a character in the drawing), can you tell me what's going on here?" or "Tree, you've been watching everything, can you tell me a story about what's happening?"

The Sequence: Story Model

Insert Story Model here (please see Appendix)

The sequence of **THE TEACHING PROCESS: From Picture Book to Child Story** begins with the selection of a **CHILD DEVELOPMENT THEME** which focuses on an experience which generally causes stress in the lives of young children. Possible stressors are listed earlier in this document.

When a theme that has relevance has been selected by the teacher, a children's picture book is selected which reflects this theme. A criteria for selection of picture books is presented earlier in this document.

The book is then shared with a child or group of children:

SHARED EXPERIENCE: The Picture Book. The reading begins with **INTRODUCING** by simply stating the main idea/theme of the story (i.e., "This is a story about Louie who very much wants a friend.")

The actual **READING** of the story then takes place. The determination of whether the story should be read in its entirety, told, or progress as a combination of the two (reading/telling) is based on several factors: age of child/ren, concentration, complexity of text. The reading should focus as much or more on the illustrations than on the text. Pause to examine the pictures; allow children to comment as they wish.

When the shared reading has been completed, the teacher than begins **THE CHILD'S RESPONSE: Storytelling** by **REVIEWING** the story. The children are guided in looking again at the pictures in sequence. Key questions are asked to focus their attention on the sequence of events, ideas, feelings described or suggested (i.e., "What is happening here...and here?" "What is happening in this picture?" "What is Louie thinking about?"
"What are his friends thinking about?" "What is Louis feeling?" "What are his friends feeling?" The questioning focuses of the "what" of the story, the events.

Having reviewed the story, the teacher moves on to **FOLLOWING-UP.** The focus is now on the main character whether it be person or animal, real or imaginative, to discuss what the story reveals about the theme. (i.e., "Why is Louis so quiet all the time?" or "Why does Louis like Gussis (the puppet) so much?"; "Why does Louis want to talk to Gussie?"; "Why does Louie hold on to Gussie so

thightly?"; "Why do you think Louie is feeling so sad and lonely?"; "Why do Louie's friends leave Gussie for him?"; "How does Louie feel when he sees Gussie with her big hello sign?" The questioning here focuses on the "why" of the story, why things seem to be happening as they do. The focus now shifts slightly to the child reader, on their experience of the story, on what they can take of it for themselves. How does Louie's experience speak to them? (i.e., "Have you ever felt like you wanted to be quiet and not talk to anyone?" or "Have you ever felt lonely?"; "Have you ever felt like nobody likes you (like you don't have any friends)?"; "Have you ever wanted to talk to a puppet (or stuffed animal)?"; "Have you ever wanted just to hold on tight to a puppet (stuffed animal)?"; "Have you ever had a scarey dream?"; "Have friends ever done something for you that makes you feel very good?" Each of these questions can be followed with "Can you tell me (us) about it?". Not all of these questions need be asked of course; the teacher can determine which seem most interesting or important to the children based on their comments as the story was shared. Whichever questions are asked and responded to, supportive comments by the teacher to the children responses might be just an "umm" or "I know" or "It's scarey", "It feels good".

THE CHILD'S RESPONSE: Drawing is based on the picture book. Once place has been selected for this step and materials are at hand, the children are invited to draw a story about their experience with the picture book. (i.e., "Lets draw a story about...). In introducing this step of the intervention, the

teacher has further choices to make. The teacher might say "Let's draw a story about wanting to be quiet and not talk to anyone" or "Let's draw a story about feeling lonely" or "...about a scarey dream". Any of the questions asked above can be selected to stimulate the subject of the drawing. If it is the teacher making the selection, it should be based, once again, on the teacher's sense of what was important to the children. The teacher might chose to open end things a little, however, by saying, "What would you like to draw that this story makes you think about?". The idea of this step of our intervention is to help the children move toward a drawing that is closer to their feelings and experience than those of the story character, but understanding that this transition might not be possible yet; drawings may stay with the picture book character. The picture book story remains, however, in the child's consciousness as stimulus, the questions raised reinforce this stimulus. The drawing begins to organize the stimulus and use it in a way that makes sense to each child personally. Beginning is important and enough for now; there is no need to push for some sense of finish that resides in the teacher's mind.

THE CHILD'S RESPONSE: Oral Storytelling invites the children to tell a story about the drawing. (i.e., "Let's tell a story about your picture/pictures." (depending on whether the teacher is working with a gathered group or one child). In some instances the drawing will have recognizable content, in others it may be that the telling of the story fills in detail not represented, or not

clearly represented, in the drawing. This makes no difference; it is the child's sense of story that should carry.

THE CHILD'S RESPONSE: Written Storytelling is the last step of our intervention and invites the children to collaborate with the teacher, or to undertake on their own, the creation of a written record of their experience with the picturebook story as well as the picture record already completed. The teacher asks each child individually, "Tell me the story about your picture again. I'll write it down for you." If the children are writers already, the teacher might say, "Write down your story. I'll help you if you need help." These stories can then be read to the children individually, to the group, or can be placed with other available published and unpublished stories for the children to look at and read as they choose. These stories, created and re-created by the children become part of a process that clarifies, hopefully soothes, and frees energy for the other experiences that are part of the business of an exciting school day. They become part of the process of opening the door of the classroom to the child's life outside, allowing children to be whole persons in school bringing their emotional selves to join with their intellectual and physical selves in a social environment that says, "All that you experience belongs to you and, therefore, belongs here with you".

References

Axline, Virginia M. (1947). Play therapy. New York: Ballantine.

Case, C and Dalley, T. (Eds.) (1990). Working with children in art therapy. New York: Tavistock/Routledge.

Delisle, R. and McNamee, A. (1981). "Children's perceptions of death: A look at the appropriateness of selected picture books", Death Education.

Dubowski, Janek. (1990). Art versus language (separate development during childhood, Working with children in art therapy, pp. 7-22.

Gillis, Ruth. (1978). Children's books for times of stress. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University.

Ginott, Haim G. (1972). Teacher & child. New York: Avon.

Kramer, E. & Wilson, L. (1978). Childhood and art therapy. New York: Schocken.

McNamee, Abigail. (1982). Children & Stress. Washington, D.C.: Association for Childhood Education International.

McNamee, A. & McNamee, J. (1981). Stressful life experiences in the early childhood educational setting. In C. Wells and I. Stuart (eds.) Self-destructive behavior in children and adolescents. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, pp. 180-206.

Nickerson, E. T. & O'Laughlin, K. (1982). Helping through action-oriented therapies. Amhurst, Mass.: Human Resource Development.

Rubin, J. A. (1978). Art therapy: Understanding and helping children grow through art. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

_____. (1984). The art of art therapy. New York: Brunner/Mazel.

Children's Book:

Keats, Ezra Jack. (1975). Louie. New York: Greenwillow.

APPENDIX

THE TEACHING PROCESS: From Picture Book to Child Story.

CHILD DEVELOPMENT THEME:

SHARED EXPERIENCE: The Picture Book

INTRODUCING:

READING: Read or tell story, focusing on pictures more than text

---

THE CHILD'S RESPONSE: Storytelling (Based on Picture Book)

REVIEWING: Guide children in looking back at pictures in sequence: "What is happening here? and here?. What is happening in this picture?"

FOLLOWING-UP: Focus on book character: "
Focus on self:

THE CHILD'S RESPONSE: Drawing (Based on the Picture Book)
Let's draw a story about "

MATERIALS: Drawing materials (pencils, thin & medium markers, crayons, ballpoint pens) and Paper (suggested sizes: 9x12 or 12x18)

THE CHILD'S RESPONSE: Oral Storytelling (Based on drawing)

GROUP: "Let's tell a story about your picture."

INDIVIDUAL: "Let's tell a story about your picture."

THE CHILD'S RESPONSE: Written Storytelling (Based on drawing)

PRE-WRITING CHILDREN: "Tell me your story (again)"
"I'll write it for you."

WRITING CHILDREN: "Write down your story."
"I'll help you if you need help."

Completed Story: Can be read to the teacher or shared with the group.